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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: LOCAL EVANGELICAL ORGANIZATION
PROVIDES MATERIAL SUPPORT TO CHURCHES

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On January 6, poloff met with Murad Kerimi, the leader of the Ashgabat-based unregistered Protestant religious group "Word of Love" Church and the unregistered "Turkmen Golden Age" ("TAA" for Turkmen Altyn Asyr) humanitarian organization. Regarding TAA, Kerimi explained that its efforts since 2001 have focused on providing assistance to a village of former refugees from Tajikistan called Soltan-bash located in Ahal Province. According to Kerimi, TAA coordinated humanitarian assistance provided by ExxonMobil, the German Embassy, and UK-based Christian charity "Tearfund" to build a school and health clinic, install a water system and bring electricity to the village consisting of 375 families. TAA has also assisted the village of Khivabad near the border with Iran, repairing a road and installing a water system and new electric power poles.

¶2. (C) In addition to these village development oriented activities, TAA also provides assistance to evangelical pastors in Turkmenistan, organizes conferences, holds summer and winter camps for children and translates, produces and distributes evangelical religious materials. Kerimi said TAA has its own translator who is currently working on a book by an American evangelist. The organization prints introductory booklets about Christianity and children's books in Turkmen language, records religious music on CDs for distribution, and has plans to translate a religious animated film into Turkmen. Kerimi said TAA provides short-term loans to evangelical pastors, ranging from \$300-500 at ten percent interest per year, as well as grants to fund religious study abroad. Kerimi was reluctant to discuss the funding source for these activities, saying only that financial resources were provided by another organization. He mentioned close ties with an American from California who comes to Turkmenistan twice a year to conduct what he called the "Million Leaders" training course. (NOTE: An Internet search turned up the "Million Leader Mandate" program -- a U.S.-based evangelical outreach to train Christian leaders. The American from California that the pastor referred to is the head of the "Friends of the Turkmen" evangelical group that has been visiting Turkmenistan for years. END NOTE.)

¶3. (C) The Word of Love Church that Kerimi leads is small,

consisting of ten women from Soltan-bash village where TAA did humanitarian work, plus one other family. They meet in an apartment in Ashgabat. He said the women were not able to meet in the village itself because it is located close to Iran and there is a strong Muslim influence, "a mullah on every corner." They tried to hold services in houses in the village with a few families, but the neighbors complained. Still, Kerimi said he has good relations with the village's Muslim spiritual leader.

¶4. (C) Kerimi briefly mentioned tentative plans of a half dozen local evangelical pastors to form a "union of churches," the purpose of which would be to act as an intermediary with the government on behalf of individual churches. When he realized that poloff was unfamiliar with these plans, Kerimi said he'd perhaps revealed a secret. He added that the pastors meet every few months to discuss the idea.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: While Kerimi was clearly cautious about disclosing full information on the activities and backing of his organization, he shared enough to reveal considerable cooperation among local evangelical Christian groups and some outside financial support, probably from a U.S. source. Local pastors discussing a union of churches is an indication that they are trying to be pro-active in seeking ways to open up channels of communication with the government. END COMMENT.
CURRAN